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DEPARTMENT STATION

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Reserve

2 U.S. BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY

3 Forage Crop Investigations [of various crops]

50 WASHINGTON, D. C.

PARA GRASS (*Panicum barbinode*).

Para grass is a native of South America and is grown somewhat commonly in Florida, to a rapidly increasing extent in southern Texas, and occasionally throughout the Gulf coast region. It is a perennial which makes its best growth on damp soils, though it has been fairly successful on Texas ranches on heavy soils without irrigation where irrigation is needed for most other crops. It is not injured by prolonged overflows and makes a vigorous growth where the land is under water several weeks. It is especially valuable for planting on ditch banks, on the margins of ponds, and on soils too wet and seepy for the cultivation of other crops. It is used for both hay and pasture. Para grass will not withstand a lower temperature than about 18° F. It is therefore adapted only to the extreme southern portion of the country and, perhaps, to California. It has succeeded as far north as Charleston, S. C.

Planting.—Para grass is usually propagated by planting pieces of the running stems, which often make a growth of 20 to 30 feet in a season. Pieces of the stems from 6 to 12 inches long and having three or four joints grow rapidly when simply pushed down into freshly plowed ground, so propagation is neither difficult nor expensive. The first growth from the cuttings is in long prostrate runners, but as soon as the ground becomes fairly well covered the plant becomes more erect, soon reaching a height of 3 to 4 feet, so the closer the cuttings are planted the sooner a crop will be secured. When cuttings are scarce and a more abundant supply is wanted for the following season, or when the field is to be used for grazing only, the cuttings may be planted 16 feet apart in each direction, as they will then cover the ground in the course of the summer and afford considerable good grazing, though the amount which can be mowed for hay will be small. When cuttings are abundant and the crop is wanted for hay they should be planted more closely, so that the ground may become covered and the erect growth secured more quickly. If planted only 1 or 2 feet apart in each direction, early in the spring, two or three good cuttings for hay may be made the first season. Cuttings may be planted at any time from early spring until as late as September, though late plantings will make little growth until the following season.

Uses.—If wanted for hay, Para grass should be cut when it reaches 3 to 4 feet in height. From three to five cuttings may be made in a season; and as from 1 to 2 tons of hay are secured at each cutting, the total yield is heavy. Many and Florida growers report having made as much as 12 tons of hay per acre in a season, and a few report much heavier yields. The hay is rather coarse, but is of excellent quality if cut as soon as it has made a sufficient growth and before the stems become hard and woody. When the grass is allowed to stand too long before cutting the stems become coarse and unpalatable and are used for pasture the grass stands trampling well and is relished by stock.

Para grass is greatly increased by annual plowings and diskings. Some growers plow in November or December, as plowing at that time is sure to break the stems, so that they will be well protected in case of a late frost. Cultivators, living below the frost line, prefer to plow in July, after the summer cutting of hay, but loosening the soil, so as to secure a better growth of cuttings and abundant winter grazing. An annual plowing is beneficial, but the season when it can be done to best advantage is of the probable winter temperature. While this grass is a perennial, which root at every point, the runners are wholly above ground, and so can be destroyed without great trouble by cutting late in the fall. In tropical regions of constant high temperature it is difficult to control, but is very easily managed where occasional frosts occur, or where irrigation is practiced. It is grown in any part of the United States except the northern part of Florida.

It is also raised under irrigation in Arizona and California. It is one of the best grasses known that will yield as heavily

S. M. TRACY,
Special Agent.

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